
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Property Address:	1700 14th Street, NW	Agenda
Landmark/District:	14th Street Historic District	Consent Calendar
		X Concept Review
Meeting Date:	May 26, 2011	X Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	11-272	New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott	Demolition
		Subdivision

Architect Eric Colbert, representing owner PN Hoffman, seeks conceptual review for alterations to the former Verizon communications facility at 14th and R Streets for conversion to retail and residential use.

Property History and Description

1700 14th Street, NW was constructed in 1903 as the North branch exchange for the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company. Beginning in 1900, as telephone service expanded in the city, branch exchanges such as this were constructed to accommodate the growing numbers of subscribers. In addition to the exchange offices, these buildings typically had recreation, reading and lunch rooms for the operators to use during their breaks; the North exchange also housed the company's training school for switchboard operators, commonly referred to as "Hello Girls." When it opened, the North exchange served 1,973 telephones north of L Street, including Washington Heights, Columbia Heights, Eckington and Brookland.

The building was designed by the New York firm of Eidlitz & MacKenzie, which specialized in the construction of buildings for the Bell telephone system, of which C&P was an associated operating partner. The partnership and its successor firms designed dozens of telephone-related buildings in Washington and throughout the country in the first half of the 20th century. The North Exchange was originally constructed as a four-story Classical Revival style brick and concrete building capped by a classical cornice and parapet and with ground-level storefronts. It was expanded with a Moderne addition to the north in the late 1930s and a fifth floor roof addition in the 1940s that resulted in the removal of the cornice. The storefronts were also removed and the first floor reclad in stone with single windows at some point in the mid-20th century.

Project Description

The project calls for converting the east half of the first floor to retail and lobby use; the western half would remain occupied by telephone equipment. The storefronts on 14th Street and the eastern two bays on R Street would be recreated based on the original drawings. The upper floor windows, which are in poor condition and include some later replacements, would be replaced with one-over-one sash to replicate the original condition. The fifth floor windows (in the later addition) would be slightly enlarged by

lowering their sills to match the proportions of the fourth floor windows. A parapet wall and cornice would be added to the top of the fifth floor to replicate these lost features. The parapet wall would serve to hide new roof decks for the top floor units, which would be accessed by new stair enclosures. The multiple penthouse stair enclosures would be clustered at the north side of the building and capped by a unifying roof.

As the existing building exceeds the allowable lot occupancy, height, and floor/area ratio, the project will require zoning relief for the Board of Zoning Adjustment.

Evaluation and Recommendation

The rebirth of 14th Street over the past decade has resulted in one of the city's most exciting and successful mixed-use corridors. However, despite the tremendous progress, there remain "problem properties" that detract from the corridor's ultimate potential. While architecturally handsome, the Verizon buildings fall into that category, with their use as a technology warehouse and fortress-like ground floors resulting in buildings that are lifeless and foreboding.

The proposed project will correct those deficiencies. The retail use at the first floor, with storefront windows on 14th and a portion of R Street, will enliven the building at the pedestrian level, while residential use above will provide a sense of life within. The physical alterations are restorative in nature and consistent with the building's original character. The roof decks and access stairs will be sufficiently pulled back from the two primary elevations as to not be prominently visible from the street; the new cornice and parapet will not only restore an important missing feature of this Classical Revival building, but will also aid in shielding the roof uses from public view.

As the project continues to be developed, the following should be developed for incorporation into the final construction plans:

- 1) Window replacement specifications, which should replicate the profiles and dimensions of the original windows and brick molding;
- 2) Cornice and parapet detailing, which should replicate the general profiles, projection and visual weight of the original elements;
- 3) The landscape and public space plan, which should maximize green space along R Street and distinguish between the residential and retail zones of the building;
- 4) The residential entrance, which ideally should be shifted to the center window opening on the R Street elevation to provide greater separation from the commercial storefronts. While this might not be possible due to restrictions placed by Verizon, additional study should be given to provide prominence and an independent identity to this element.

The HPO recommends that the Review Board approve the project in concept, and delegate final approval to staff.